

# Recovering from Joint Surgery

## A Patient Guide

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- Pelvic Osteotomy
- Total Hip Replacement
- Total Knee Replacement
- Total Shoulder Replacement
- Total Elbow Replacement

The following are some guidelines to follow at home to help you recover safely and comfortably from your surgery. If there is a difference between this pamphlet and specific instructions from your surgeon, family doctor or orthopaedic team, **follow the instructions specific to you from the surgeon/doctor/team.**

## Preventing Pain

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The pain related to your surgery will gradually subside over 6 weeks to 3 months following surgery. These are some ways to keep yourself comfortable.

### Take Pain Medication –

- Follow the instructions provided with your medication.
- Do not wait until the pain is bad before you take pain medication. Try taking two extra strength tylenol tablets every 4 to 6 hours on a regular basis for the first few weeks at home. Do not take more than 8 tablets per day.
- If you are taking tylenol and your pain still interferes with your rest, activity, mood or appetite, also take the medication your doctor prescribed for you on a regular basis along with the tylenol. An exception to this is if the prescribed medication contains tylenol – such as tylenol #3 – in this case you would only take the prescribed medication, and not the extra tylenol.
- Do not push yourself beyond your limit. Rest when you feel tired and uncomfortable.
- If you find your exercises are painful, take pain medication and wait 30 minutes before exercising. You may also wish to have pain medication before having your staples taken out. After a knee replacement, it is important to continue range of motion exercises despite some discomfort which will subside with time. If in doubt, consult with your physiotherapist and/or surgeon.

- Distract yourself from pain (i.e. listen to music, visit with friends, write letters, watch TV, etc.).
- Use relaxation exercises such as breathing exercises. A warm shower may help if your staples are out and there is no drainage from your incision.
- Lie down, elevate your limb and place an ice pack wrapped in a towel on the painful area for 15 minutes up to three times a day. A packet of frozen vegetables wrapped in a towel works well too.
- Think positively. You will become more and more comfortable with time.

**Notify your family doctor or surgeon immediately if you have:**

- A sudden severe increase in pain in your new joint.
- Pain or aching in your calves, redness of the calf, and/or increasing swelling of the foot and ankle.

**If unable to contact doctor, go to the nearest Emergency Department.**

## Sleep

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For hip or knee surgery, you may sleep on your back or either side. **Be sure to keep two pillows between your legs for the first three months if you have had a hip replacement. Do not put a pillow under your operated knee if you have had total knee replacement surgery.**

## Swelling

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If you have had hip or knee surgery, you can expect to have some swelling in the affected limb for the first few weeks after surgery. To help reduce the swelling, elevate your legs whenever possible and do the foot pumping exercise you learned in the hospital.

## Constipation

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Constipation is the biggest problem for people taking morphine, oxycodone, dilaudid or codeine. Take a preventative approach: drink plenty of fluids, eat a high fibre diet including bran and prunes and take laxatives as required. Fiber supplements such as Fruit Lax or 'Get up and Go Cookies' bulk up the stool making it easier to pass through the bowels. Senna tea, Senakot tablets or glyssennid tablets help the stool move along through the bowel. Glycerine or dulcolax suppositories will help to clear the lower bowel. It is important to follow instructions for your medications carefully to avoid side effects. Ask your physician or pharmacist if you have any questions. See your physician if you experience ongoing problems with constipation, nausea and vomiting.

## Blood Clot Prevention

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If you have had hip or knee replacement surgery, you will require low molecular weight heparin (LMWH) to prevent harmful blood clots. Most patients will need to continue this medication once they go home. Your doctor will provide you with a prescription for the LMWH that will specify the number of days that you need to do injections when you leave the hospital. It is important to follow the medication instructions carefully. Continue taking it for the full length of time prescribed by your doctor.

**Call 911 if you have chest pain or shortness of breath.**

## Preventing Infection

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- Your incision may be exposed to air once there is no drainage. If you find it more comfortable, a strip dressing may be applied. Strip dressings may be purchased at the drug store.
- **Your staples should be removed 12 to 14 days after your surgery.** You may arrange this with your family doctor, a nurse or other qualified health care provider e.g. physiotherapist.
- See your family doctor if you have a sore throat, urinary infection or any other signs of infections.

**Notify your surgeon immediately if you notice any of the following:**

- redness and swelling around the incision
- increase local pain and warmth
- yellow or green foul smelling drainage
- a persistent increase in your temperature above 38°C or 101°F.

## Anemia (low blood count)

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Your hemoglobin may be low following surgery. It is recommended that most people take an iron supplement for the month following surgery. Consult with your family physician about this.

## Follow-up with Surgeon

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Contact your surgeon's office as soon as you get home to schedule a follow-up appointment for 6 weeks.

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